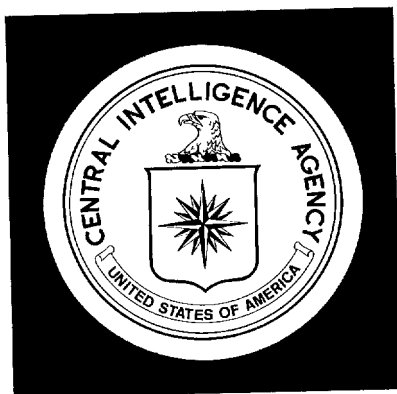


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LIBYA-TUNISIA: The proposed union of the two countries, announced Saturday by Presidents Qadhafi and Bourguiba, will be difficult to achieve and may never become anything more than a paper agreement. No deadline has been set for completion of the merger, and the public referendum to ratify the declaration of unity, initially set for January 18, was postponed to March 20 by President Bourguiba because of "procedural reasons."

Plans for the new republic call for a single constitution, one president, and unified armed forces. Official announcements broadcast from Tunis and Tripoli said the new state would be called the "Arab Islamic Republic."

The proposed union was probably a Libyan initiative. Qadhafi presumably turned to Tunisia as a first step in recouping some of his lost prestige and political influence following the collapse of the Libyan-Egyptian merger last September. Libya's relations with Cairo deteriorated further when Qadhafi sharply criticized Egyptian President Sadat's conduct of the October war and subsequent negotiations. Union with Egypt is now a dead issue. Cairo, nevertheless, has issued a bland statement approving the merger as a step toward Arab unity.

Although it has not been announced who will be the new president, Qadhafi may offer Bourguiba the presidency as he did in an earlier unsuccessful attempt to form a union with Tunisia in December 1972. Even if Bourguiba becomes head of the new republic, it will be Qadhafi, an ardent campaigner for Arab unity, who will claim much of the credit for the merger.

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Bourguiba, although long a supporter of Arab unity, probably sees the proposed merger primarily as an opportunity to have a moderating influence on Qadhafi and to pull him back from his present isolation in the Arab world. This may prove an impossible task, because of the two leaders' widely divergent policies on Israel and many other issues.

In his press statement, Bourguiba also expressed the hope that Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco would eventually join the Tunisian and Libyan peoples in an even broader union. This is highly unlikely; mutual distrust and essentially competitive economies have frustrated previous attempts to achieve north African unity. Algeria has already publicly criticized the merger as an "unnatural construction" and stressed that Libya was only trying to seek a new partner following its failure with Egypt.

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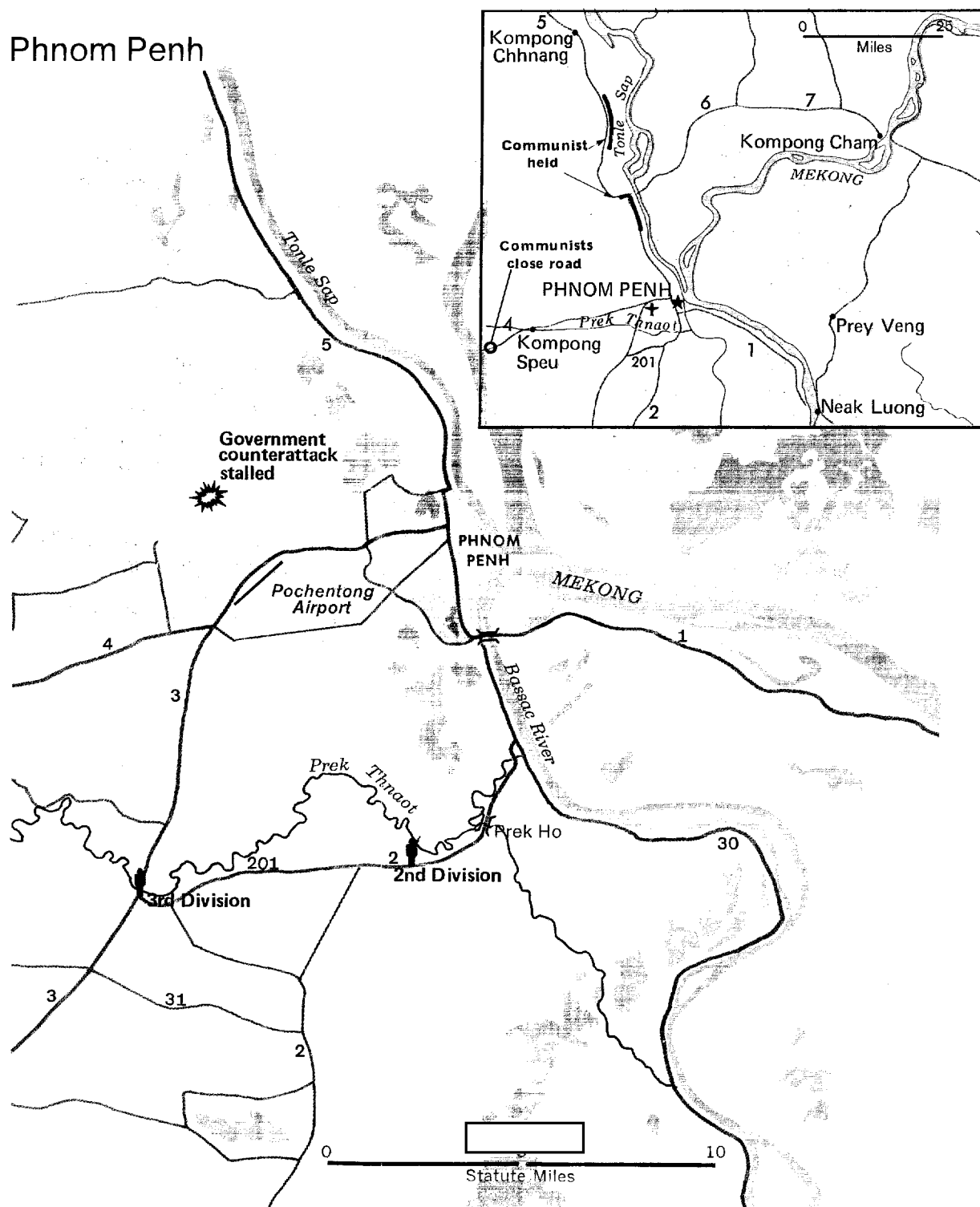
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CAMBODIA: Military activity remained centered in the Phnom Penh region over the weekend. The Cambodian Army counterattack against Khmer Communist forces three to five miles northwest of the capital has bogged down in the face of stiff enemy resistance. Army commanders have committed additional armored units to try to break the deadlock. A Communist rocket attack on January 12 damaged both the runway and control tower at Phnom Penh's Pochentong airport, but normal air operations continue.

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Meanwhile, Communist units over the weekend again cut Route 4 southwest of Kompong Speu city, forcing Phnom Penh-bound trucks to turn back. Army commanders last week pulled major units back from the Route 4 front to counter the threat to Phnom Penh.

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**TURKEY:** The left-of-center Republican People's Party and the Islam-oriented National Salvation Party announced an agreement Sunday to form a coalition government. The two parties have about 235 deputies in the 450-member National Assembly. The badly split legislature has been unable to form a government since the inconclusive elections in mid-October.

There have been indications that the Turkish military, restless over the three-month political stalemate, has been applying pressure to secure a government acceptable to it. The military, with a strong secular tradition, has been opposed to allowing the National Salvation Party to take part in the government.

If the President accepts the coalition, the military may decide to let it take office and then assess its early performance. On the other hand, the military might decide on immediate action to bring about a broad national coalition or a government based on cooperation between the Republican People's Party and the Justice Party, the parties with the largest representation in parliament.

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FOR THE RECORD\*

USSR-CUBA: According to Western correspondents in Moscow, well-informed Soviet sources reported on January 12 that party chief Brezhnev's trip to Cuba is now set for January 18.

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*\*This item was prepared by CIA without consultation with the Departments of State and Defense.*

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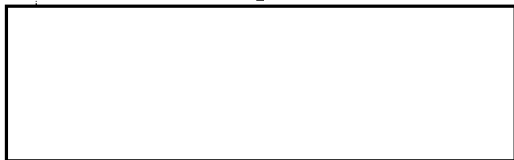
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